

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 1 MARCH 2021 – 7 MARCH 2021



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

This week, we consider the Fourth Commandment, which is about keeping the Sabbath day. This commandment is perhaps the most contentious of the Ten Commandments. Many Bible believing Christians have concluded differently about the Sabbath, what it means for us Christians and how to apply it in our lives today.

The Sabbath is important for Christians, but I believe Christians can understand and apply it differently without being unfaithful to the Bible. Of course, it is not as if anything goes. Like Kevin DeYoung, my view lies somewhere between “keeping Saturday as Sabbath as strictly and directly as in the Old Testament times” and “the Sabbath does not apply to us anymore.”¹ And I believe the Heidelberg Catechism brings out the core teaching of the Fourth Commandment well.

It is impossible, however, to give a full account of my own view in this short introduction to this week’s devotional aid, let alone explaining all the different views. I will leave you to read and consider God’s Word yourself, but here are four principles to keep in mind.

1) The Sabbath, or the rest principle is built into the creation by God.

We see this from the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 where God Himself rested on the seventh day, setting a work-and-rest pattern for us. We all know that we need to rest from our labour time to time. But what this rest principle from creation shows us is that we must trust God’s wisdom in how He made the world and take an appropriate pattern of rest for ourselves, trusting that it is good for us.

2) The Sabbath, or the rest principle is also founded on the redemption by God.

The Mosaic covenant commanded the Sabbath rest for Israelites who were redeemed by God. But while the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 grounds it in creation, in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the same Sabbath commandment grounds its rationale in redemption. This means that the purpose of the Fourth Commandment is not merely to give us a day to rest from hard labour, but to point us forward to the final rest (from sin and judgment) when the redemption is fully realised.

3) Jesus transformed the Sabbath.

In reading and applying the Old Testament laws, we must never forget how Jesus is the fulfilment of all laws. To discern how exactly Jesus fulfilled a particular law in the Old Testament may be a difficult task. At the very least, however, we must remember that “Jesus emphasised the spiritual significance of the Sabbath,”² while He exposed and broke away from the human customs built around the Sabbath. In short, Jesus taught that “the Sabbath was a day of freedom (Luke 13:10-17), a day of healing (Luke 14:1-6), and a day for doing good (Mark 3:1-6).”³

4) Finally, the Sabbath Commandment teaches us to trust the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ (Mark 2:28).

This is why we must strive to gather as God’s people to hear from Christ and worship Him in the Holy Spirit. Trusting God was the main focus of the Fourth Commandment in the Old Testament. As Kevin DeYoung reminds us, “the issue was one of trust. The Sabbath reminded Israel of God’s sufficiency and supply.”⁴ Once Jesus came, “He showed us the true meaning of the Sabbath; namely, that we should not

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, 179.

² Kevin DeYoung, 180.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

rely on ourselves but trust in God as our provider, sustainer, deliverer, and saviour.”⁵ So, not only on a Sunday, which is now the normal day of gathering as God’s people because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, but every day is a day to rest from our vain efforts to gain salvation or doing more evil, but to fully trust Jesus who is our Lord and Saviour.

In summary, we, Christians, continue to obey God’s commandment about the Sabbath by trusting and resting in Christ for our life and salvation.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

<https://www.upperhunterpc.com>

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM⁶

Lord’s Day 37

Q103) What is God’s will for you in the fourth commandment?

A) First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God’s people to learn what God’s Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through His Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.

GENESIS 2:1-3

Gen 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Here at the end of the creation account, we read that God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because He rested from His work in creation on that day. What we are seeing is God setting a pattern for the whole creation. God’s intention and design does not stop at tangible things that He made, but the way time and our efforts are to be used. We, as human beings, are God’s image bearers. And even in our pattern of work and rest, we are to image or mirror God. And yet, we cannot truly rest from our work unless we trust God to provide for us and sustain us. Therefore, when we rest from our work regularly, we may experience God’s blessings that comes through faith in Him.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank you for providing and sustaining me, and thank you for giving me a pattern of work and rest. Help me to trust you and so be able to rest in You. I pray this in Jesus’s name. Amen.

MARK 2:23-28

Mark 2:23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” 25 And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests

⁵ Kevin DeYoung, 181.

⁶ The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.

to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" 27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

In the Old Testament times, Israel as a nation was given a special task to show who God is to the world. That is why the whole nation was given a strict set of rules to follow, including the Sabbath regulations. However, Israel failed to keep God's law, but in addition, they also added to God's law as a vain attempt to keep God's law. So for example, the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus's time had all sorts of extra rules that they imposed on the people so they may not break God's law about the Sabbath. What we see in Mark 2:23-28 (and there are others in the New Testament) is that Jesus claiming to be the Lord of the Sabbath and teaching the true meaning of the Sabbath. He is exposing the human customs around the Sabbath that are not God's Word and liberating people from being bound to such human customs. Christians can also fall into similar mistakes. When Christians or churches try to impose too strict rules about keeping Sunday as Lord's Day, such zeal may end up binding people to human customs rather than to God's Word. The important thing is to recognise Jesus's lordship over all spheres of our lives, whether Sunday or weekdays.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

I struggle to understand and apply the Fourth Commandment in my life. Please help me not to impose human customs in my own life or to other people's lives. And please give me wisdom and true convictions from the Spirit about how I should keep the Fourth Commandment, and trust Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath. I pray in Jesus's name. Amen.